A CHINESE BANQUET
By Kitty Tsui, 1983

_for the one who was not invited_

it was not a very formal affair but
all the women over twelve
wore long gowns and a corsage,
except for me.

she sits across from me,
emotions invading her face.
her eyes are wet but
she will not let tears fall.

it was not a very formal affair, just
the family getting together,
poa poa, kuw fu without kuw mow*
(her excuse this year is a headache).

mother, I say,
you love a man.
i love a woman.
it is not what she wants to hear.

aunts and uncles and cousins,
the grandson who is a dentist,
the one who drives a mercedes benz,
sitting down for shark’s fin soup.

aunts and uncles and cousins,
very much a family affair.
but you are not invited,
being neither my husband nor my wife.

they talk about buying a house and
taking a two week vacation in Beijing.
i suck on shrimp and squab,
dreaming of the cloudscape in your eyes.

aunts and uncles and cousins
eating longevity noodles
fragrant with ham inquire:
sold that old car of yours yet?

my mother, her voice beaded with sarcasm:
you’re twenty six and not getting younger.
it’s about time you got a decent job.
she no longer asks when i’m getting married.

i want to tell them: my back is healing,
i dream of dragons and water.
my home is in her arms,
our bedroom ceiling the wide open sky.

you're twenty six and not getting younger.
what are you doing with your life?
you've got to make a living.
why don’t you study computer programming?

she no longer asks when I’m getting married.
one day, wanting desperately to
bridge the boundaries that separate us,
wanting desperately to touch her,
tell her: mother, i’m gay,
mother i’m gay and so happy with her.
but she will not listen,
she shakes her head.

*poa poa = grandmother
kuw fu = uncle
kuw mow = aunt